

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## Mission

The mission of the Homeless Families Plan is to:  
Prevent and reduce homelessness of families with children by effectively coordinating and using available resources.

## Goals

The goals of the Plan are to:

- Shelter homeless families
- Return homeless families to stable housing
- Increase the number of families accessing needed Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) services
- Assist families likely to become homeless with maintaining stable housing
- Generate new information on the way homeless or at-risk families use DSHS services, and the impacts of those services on their ability to regain or maintain stable housing
- Improve DSHS staff and contractor understanding of homelessness and participation in homelessness planning

## Background

*In Seattle El Centro de la Raza helped a homeless family of eight with rent assistance and case management for eleven months. The family was able to become self-sufficient and has been living in their own home, which they purchased themselves.*

In December 1997, the Washington State Supreme Court, in a 5-4 majority opinion, upheld the King County Superior Court's ruling that DSHS must "develop, administer, supervise, and monitor a coordinated and comprehensive plan that establishes, aids, and strengthens services for the protection and care of homeless...children." The Superior Court's ruling was based on RCW 74.13.031(1), the child welfare statute that authorizes DSHS to prepare a plan for use of federal child welfare funds, and to provide services to abused, neglected, and dependent children and their families.

The State Supreme Court also ruled on the circumstances in which juvenile courts may require DSHS to provide housing assistance to homeless families with children in lieu of placing or retaining the children in out-of-home placements such as foster care. The Court ruled that the juvenile courts' authority to order DSHS to provide housing assistance is limited to cases in which homelessness is the primary factor for placing or retaining children in out-of-home placements. The housing assistance may include referrals to federal, state, local, or private agencies or organizations, assistance with forms and applications, or financial subsidies for housing.

In cases in which there are multiple factors involved such as abuse and neglect, as well as homelessness, the Court ruled that the case manager, not the court, has the authority to determine what types of services are needed and in which order.

In its Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order, the King County Superior Court summarized expert testimony stating that “an effective plan to address the needs of homeless children would include prevention services, adequate emergency programs, and programs to assist families to obtain affordable housing.” The two agencies have used these service categories as a guide for organizing planning activities and developing action steps for the original Homeless Families Plan, the subsequent Homeless Families Plan for the 2001-2003 biennium and this updated plan for the 2003-2005 biennium.

### Legislation

The Legislature and the Governor agreed that a significant amount of new resources were necessary to implement the Plan and assist homeless families with children. Their unanimous concurrence on a well-defined state policy to improve services for homeless families with children and the \$25.5 million they committed toward that goal laid the foundation for change.

After extensive debate and amendments, the Washington State Legislature passed E2SHBa 1493 (Chapter 267, Laws of 1999) to establish state policy and legislative intent on services to homeless families and define CTED’s and DSHS’ roles and responsibilities. This state policy calls for effective collaboration and coordination of services provided by the two state executive agencies. It envisions an ongoing partnership of the state agencies with local communities to focus on solutions and resources at the local level.

The following are the major elements of the legislation. The Legislature:

- intends that services to homeless families with children shall be provided within funds appropriated for that specific purpose by the legislature;
- intends that children must not be placed or retained in out-of-home placements if homelessness is the primary reason for placement;

*In Wahkiakum County, a young single working mother of two, after 12 months on THOR, paid off major bills and fines, regained her driver's license and got on Section 8. She greatly appreciated not only the financial assistance but also the opportunity to find out for the first time that she and her children are able to live on their own.*

- directs DSHS, under a new section included in DSHS' general authorizing statute, Chapter 43.20A, to collaborate with CTED in the development of the Plan, and assume responsibility for administering and monitoring portions of the Plan relevant to DSHS;
- directs CTED to be the principle state department responsible for providing shelter and housing services to homeless families with children, and for coordinating, planning, and overseeing the development of a comprehensive and coordinated state plan for homeless families with children;
- deletes DSHS' responsibilities, under the child welfare statute, RCW 74.13.031(1), for developing a plan for homeless children;
- directs CTED to develop and implement a database to collect information on homeless families with children, within amounts appropriated for this specific purpose;
- authorizes DSHS, in cases in which homelessness is the *primary* reason for a child's placement or retention in out-of-home care, to assist families with housing services within funds appropriated for this specific purpose. These housing services may include, but are not limited to, referrals to federal, state, local, or private agencies or organizations, assistance with forms and applications, or financial subsidies for housing; and
- clarifies that the Juvenile Court's ability to order DSHS to provide housing assistance is limited to cases in which homelessness or the lack of adequate and safe housing is the primary reason for an out-of-home placement, and is subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this specific purpose.

### **Achievements of Earlier Plans**

Previous Homeless Families Plans have served as the catalyst and focal point for evolving collaborations between state and local government and the private sector leading to dynamic strategies intended to help Washington State homeless families with children achieve housing stability.

Innovations began with the implementation of the first biennial plan for SFY 1999 – 2001.

Activities included:

- DSHS and Division of Children and Families staff training on homelessness
- New Section 8 housing voucher program (Welfare-to-Work vouchers)

- Local and statewide rural Continuum of Care planning
- Changing the Additional Requirements Emergent Needs Program (AREN)

Funding accomplishments included:

- Expanding funding of the AREN Program and Diversion Cash Assistance (DCA) Program
- Additional Emergency Shelter Assistance Program (ESAP) funds
- Creation of the Transitional Housing Operating and Rent program
- Dedication of capital preservation and construction funds for housing projects
- Improved data collection methods and practices by CTED and DSHS

Coordination accomplishments included:

- New collaborative relationships between CTED, DSHS, and the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless
- New relationships between community-based housing providers and DSHS staff, including DSHS participation in local Continuum of Care planning processes